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ABSTRACT

This issue brief offers principles and guidelines for evaluating educational policies on the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings. Special education's development into an increasingly separate system since 1975 is noted, as is the continuing influence of policies that segregate students by disability. The brief proposes a framework for a standards-based, system-wide reform. Six major policy goals are discussed: (1) curriculum (use of the same student standards for all students); (2) assessment (provision of testing accommodations, adaptations, and alternative assessments when needed); (3) accountability (inclusion of all students' achievement data in assessment data); (4) professional development (requirements for training in adapting instruction and curriculum); (5) funding (linking of various streams of education funding); and (6) governance (uniting of lines of authority and administrative structures so leaders feel responsible for all students). Specific questions are suggested for policy makers and practitioners at both the state and school district levels concerning each of these six areas. A table summarizes the framework, including both general policy goals and inclusive policy objectives, and criteria for each of the six areas. (DB)

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A Framework for Evaluating State and Local Policies for Inclusion

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142)[1] guaranteed the right of every student with a disability to a free, appropriate public education. Although many schools were serving some students with disabilities at that time, the landmark legislation ensured that no student, regardless of the severity of his or her disability, could be turned away by the public education system. P.L. 94-142 also provided official sanction for the bureaucratic development of *special education*. The federal legislation unfortunately spawned the growth of policies, rules, and regulations at the federal, state and local level whose premise was that *special* education is *separate* education.

The Separation of Children from General Education

Since 1975, special education has continued to grow as a separate and *separating* system. That is, while significant strides were made in developing diagnostic and teaching strategies that could be used with students who have a variety of disabilities, those strategies were applied increasingly in educational settings that were "special" – that is, separate from the classroom, neighborhood school, and community of the student in special education. As students moved away from the general education environment, they also moved away from the accepted curriculum and expectations that applied to other students in the community. Having been educated to believe that they did not have the expertise to work with students with disabilities, many general education teachers and school personnel abdicated responsibility for the education of students with disabilities to others. Separate governance and finance structures were developed to support the separate system of special education. And policies were developed throughout the entire educational system to support a special, separate system of education.

Advocates for ***inclusion***[2] support the need for specialized services, but do not support *separate*

EC 305323

[1] This act was amended in 1990 and is now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA.

[2] As defined in ***Winners All: A Call for Inclusive Schools*** (NASBE, 1992), *inclusion* means that students in special education — to the maximum extent possible — receive their in-school educational services in the general education classroom with appropriate in-class support. Included students attend their neighborhood school with their age and grade peers. In inclusive districts, the proportion of students labeled for special services is relatively uniform for all of the schools within the district, and that ratio reflects the proportion of people with disabilities in society at large.

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education. Advocates are concerned about the lower expectations educators frequently have for students in special education, as well as the social isolation that results from students going to classes and schools with students who are not from their community. While families and advocates have been working on a student-by-student basis to return segregated students with disabilities to the general education classroom, their efforts have often run up against a culture with negative attitudes toward students with disabilities. These attitudes are embodied in a labyrinth of state and local policies that make students' inclusion the exception, not the rule. Families and advocates are now working to change or limit the effects of the plethora of policies, laws, rules and regulations that separate children with disabilities from the general education school, classroom and student. It is their hope that policies that support the philosophy of specialized services and support in the general education environment may then inform and promote inclusionary practices and student placement decisions for all students with disabilities.

Policies that have the effect of segregating students by disability may be found both in general education and special education. Their effect may be by *omission* or *commission*. For instance, by omitting any mention of students with disabilities from state standards documents, policy makers may be sending a signal to local districts that the standards do not apply to students with disabilities. By not referring to general education, age-appropriate curriculum objectives on student Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), special education teachers send a signal to parents and general education teachers that the curriculum is not pertinent for these children.

Other policies more directly segregate students. A state funding formula that provides a district with special education dollars based on the number and type of special education classrooms established by the district, encourages the district to set up separate special education classes. Similarly, general student aid funding formulas that do not provide a district with the basic per pupil allocation for any student with an IEP encourage districts to remove those differently-funded students from the general class so that they can be accounted for, and funded by, special education.

Standards-Based, Systemic Reform

In an effort to help state and local policy makers, practitioners, and families determine if the general education policies of their state or district support the inclusion of students with disabilities, CISP developed an analytical framework.

The framework was developed using the prevailing paradigm for educational reform in virtually every state: standards-based, systemic reform. This paradigm holds that if high, rigorous standards are created for *all* students and clearly communicated to educators, students, parents, business leaders, policy makers and the community at large, then all will focus their efforts on the same goals. In this way, the curriculum takes on a heightened importance in the educational equation. It is assumed that all students, both rich and poor, those who speak English as their primary language or not, should reach the same high standards. Furthermore, standards-based reform assumes there will be less state and federal regulation in order to provide local districts and schools the maximum amount of flexibility that might be needed to help students reach the standards. The tradeoff for greater flexibility is accountability — that is, holding schools and districts accountable for educational results. In this model, it is the actual outcomes of the system — whether or not students achieve the standards — that matter. Hence, student evaluation becomes the primary measure of the system. Districts that consistently fail to get students to reach those standards are, in some states, in jeopardy of being dissolved into neighboring districts or taken over by state officials.

Standards-based, systemic reform also calls for aligning all facets of policy to support the standards so that reform will be *system wide*. The proposed framework is based on six major policy areas that should address any educational initiative: curriculum, student assessment, accountability, personnel development and professional

training, finance and governance. Current educational reformers seek to ensure that the student standards become the foundation of the curriculum and student assessment. Furthermore, reformers seek to hold schools and districts accountable for ensuring that students actuallyobtain those standards. They seek to align teacher and other personnel development policies so that educators are required to: (1) have the same knowledge and skills as those asked of students, and (2) know how to teach those standards to students. ***The standards-based, system wide approach to educational reform provides the context for most current state and local education policy and hence the content for our framework.***

Inclusive Policy Goals in Standards-Based, Systemic Reform

In this framework, the major policy goals for standards-based reform are:

Curriculum — curricula that embody high expectations and standards for achieving individual potential;

Assessment — measurable results for teaching and learning;

Accountability — responsibility among all stakeholders;

Professional Development — necessary training and tools for all personnel;

Funding — funding that maximizes the use of every education dollar; and

Governance — central leadership and support with local control and responsibility.

In addition, the framework is based on the following overall assumptions:

- The educational needs of students are not defined by an assigned category or level of severity of disability;
- To the maximum extent possible, students with special needs should be meaningfully included in the regular education program;
- Educators should strive for culturally-competent, family-centered policies, based on a clear vision of high expectations for the education of ***all*** children, including those with severe disabilities, in inclusive environments; and
- Technology plays an integral role in virtually all aspects of policy development and school practice, including the acquisition of skills necessary for all students to function in an information age.

Given the context of standards-based, systemic reform, what would be the major policy objectives for general education in inclusive schools? First, in the area of ***curriculum***, different instructional approaches and materials should be made available that could be appropriately used with a variety of student populations, but all curricula should use the same student standards as their foundation, for instance, communication skills, problems solving skills. Advocates have long been concerned that the funding stream that provides additional support for a student can dictate and define the curriculum for that student. For instance, Title I students (formerly Chapter I) often receive the "compensatory" curriculum, special education students may receive the "functional" curriculum or the "deaf curriculum." Categorically driven funding streams serve to further segregate students within educational systems and create unnecessary variability in curriculum and instructional practices. Such variations in curriculum and instruction should not be based on a disability label or any particular category of funding.

An inclusive policy goal in ***assessment*** would be that states and districts utilize a *variety* of student assessments to test student proficiency in the standards. The assessment policies and procedures would require specific accommodations for student disabilities, such as having tests provided

in braille or allowing students to take tests untimed. In addition, states and districts would require testing adaptations and alternative assessments for students unable to take the official assessments even with accommodations. Coupled with this, states and districts would eliminate *testing exclusion* policies that allow districts to categorically exclude students with IEPs from the testing process altogether, since each student would be assessed in some fashion. Student test scores for those with IEPs who took a modified or alternative assessment would be reported separately from the general student population in district reports.

Inclusive ***accountability*** policies would rely on student achievement data from *every* student within a school or district. (Currently many states allow districts to exclude students who have taken an adapted or alternative assessment from state accountability reports.) However, to evaluate the impact and/or outcomes of supports to students with disabilities, it would be necessary to disaggregate assessment data for students with disabilities from the general student population data. In addition, *special education* accountability would rely on indicators of student success and the quality of the teaching and learning environment (as does general education accountability), rather than on *compliance monitoring* based on the students' due process rights. Examples of general education quality indicators include: the instructional climate, curriculum, instructional methodologies used in a district, and district professional development plans. On the other hand, accountability based on compliance monitoring assures that proper notification was given to each family for the procedures of testing, qualifying for special education, and creating and reviewing IEPs for their child in special education. However, a compliance review does not monitor student achievement or the overall quality of the educational program.

An inclusive policy goal in ***personnel training and professional development*** supports and encourages the involvement of all personnel in addressing the learning needs of a diverse student population, including students with disabilities. Included in this would be state certification requirements that focus on adapting curriculum and instructional practices for a variety of learning styles. Pre-service, field-based teaching experiences would be conducted in inclusive classrooms to the maximum extent possible. Training for existing personnel would be conducted jointly for all service providers — general and special education teachers, paraeducators and specialists. Classes would be co-taught and/or curriculum content from various fields integrated, with an emphasis on making accommodations and designing learning supports. The overall focus of training would be on the similarities among student needs and making appropriate accommodations as necessary, rather than on student "differences" that are often then translated to mean "deficiencies."

Inclusive ***funding*** policies would seek to link various streams of education funding to one another and to the basic student aid formula. First, inclusive funding policies would allow a variety of categorical funds (e.g., special education, limited English proficient (LEP), migrant education, and Title I) to be combined to serve a student population that may: (1) qualify for more than one category of funding, (2) be so pervasive in a particular school that to provide general support to the whole school is more efficient, or (3) individually not qualify the school for a significant amount of resources, such as a full-time teacher or classroom aide, but in combination can. Second, inclusive funding policies linked to the basic student aid formula would ensure that as the basic aid formula increased, so would the special categorical funding (andvice versa), so that special programs would not be competing with the basic program in a particular school. Finally, inclusive funding policies would ensure that a district received the same amount of money for a particular student regardless of where the student received services. That is, the funding system would be placement neutral.

Inclusive ***governance*** policies would principally unite the lines of authority so that local and state leaders would feel a greater sense of ownership for all students, rather than just the "regular" student population. This would require an admin-

istrative structure within the educational system that serves all students, rather than maintaining separate systems for general and special education and other student populations. In addition, school-level, local site councils (through site-based management) would have authority over special education as well as general education and would be provided adequate training to consider the needs of students with disabilities in their planning.

The policy goals, along with the inclusive policy objectives are summarized in Table A on pages 10-11.

Questions for Policy Makers and Practitioners in Assessing Key Aspects of Education Reform

The actual policies in these six general areas are multi-faceted and complex. In order to evaluate the extent to which the policies in your state or school district support inclusion, the following state- and local-level questions should be explored in each of the six policy areas.

Curriculum

States generally refer to two levels of standards: Content standards that define what should be taught and performance standards that describe at what level a child should have mastered a content standard.

State-Level Questions

- Has the state adopted standards that are broad in scope and purpose? That is, do the standards encompass more than strictly academic outcomes as defined by the traditional disciplines?

- Are the performance standards appropriate for students with disabilities as well? If not, what changes need to be made by the state?

- Does the state provide a model curriculum, curriculum frameworks or examples of curriculum adaptations, based on the same standards, that could be used with students with significant disabilities?

District-Level Questions

- Are parents and other community members aware of the curriculum and are they actively involved in the development and review of the district's curriculum?

- What is the approved curriculum in the district? Does the district develop/ provide model curricula or examples of curriculum adaptations that could be used with students with significant disabilities or any student characteristic(s)?

- Do *all* students have the opportunity to access the core curriculum in a manner that takes into consideration their individual disabilities and learning styles?
  What processes and provisions are available for adapting or modifying the curriculum to meet the needs of a variety of students?

- Does the district utilize instructional methods and materials that are responsive to the needs of a heterogeneous school population? Has the district established specific instructional priorities andgoals for meeting the learning needs of each and every child? Does the district encourage teachers to utilize new strategies for accommodating diverse student learning needs in every classroom?

Assessment

State-Level Questions

- Does the state have written guidelines and exemplars for the participation of students with disabilities in state assessments used for accountability purposes?*

- Does the state have written guidelines and exemplars for the use of accommodations by students with disabilities in state assessment systems?*

- Does the state have written requirements, guidelines and exemplars for the use of alternative assessments by students with significant disabilities who are unable to participate in the standard state assessment system?

- Does the state prohibit certain groups of students to be excluded from the state assessment system?

- Does the state have written guidelines and exemplars for reporting assessment results for students with disabilities in state assessments?*

* **Source:** Adapted from the National Center on Educational Outcomes' *Draft Criteria for Evaluating State or District Large-Scale Assessment Guidelines for Students with Disabilities*, April 1996.

District-Level Questions

- Is the performance of all students considered in assessing the student population of the district? If so, what measures are used in assessing students with disabilities?

- Are assessments based on curricular content?

- Are students encouraged to demonstrate their proficiency in a variety of ways? Are multiple methods of assessing student understanding utilized in classrooms?

- Do districts provide alternative formats and accommodations when assessing the learning needs of students with disabilities who cannot participate in standard district assessments? What accommodations are provided as the tool(s) for assessment?

- Do district policies promote including special populations in assessments rather than excluding them?

- Does the district prohibit the exclusion of certain students from the district assessment systems altogether?

Accountability

State-Level Questions

- Does the state have an accountability system focused on the process of teaching and learning for allstudents versus accountability focused only on environmental conditions such as how many books are in the library or space requirements for classrooms?

- Does the state's accountability system focus on student performance as the basis for capturing data on student learning? Are the assessment data for students with disabilities disaggregated, yet part of a district's report?

- Does the state collect data on the number of students excluded from state assessments in a district and follow up when the percentage of excluded students is too high?

- Do accountability models that provide programmatic and regulatory flexibility consider student outcomes for students with disabilities?

- Are there any quality indicators articulated for students with disabilities and other special student populations in statewide accountability plans?

- Is special education monitoring linked to district accountability/accreditation procedures?

- Does the system of accountability provide rewards and sanctions to schools and localities; that is, does the accountability system matter to the local districts?

- Does the state include special education in consolidated plans submitted to the federal government?

District-Level Questions

- Does the district maintain a results-oriented data collection, analysis and reporting system-

-aligned with the state accountability system– that focuses on the types of services students need, not labels or placement?

- Does the system include reporting mechanisms to local boards of education and student advocacy groups?

- Does the district produce a "report card" on schools? Do schools produce "report cards" on themselves and share them with the community? Are students with disabilities included in that reporting process?

- Are all members of the community (i.e., parents, teachers, faculty, administrators, civic leaders, students, etc.) part of the review groups for student exhibitions?

- Do district-level data systems track the progress of students in inclusive programs as well as those served in segregated, pull-out programs?

- Does the district include special education in consolidated plans or in district strategic plans for the state?

Personnel Development and Professional Training

State-Level Questions

- Does the state support a system of personnel development and professional training that addresses the learning needs of students with the full range of abilities?

- Do state licensure requirements and licensure categories promote or hinder the development of a broad cadre of effective teaching practices for all students?

- Does the professional development system encourage joint training opportunities for general and special education students?

- Do continuing education requirements in states promote the development of teaching competencies for a broad array of learners?

- Are special education teachers regularly involved in general education, statewide teacher trainingprograms and networks in areas such as performance-based assessment, math and science education, and writing across the curriculum?

District-Level Questions

- Are professional development opportunities and funds utilized to develop teacher, staff and administrator competencies in responding to the needs of all students?

- Does the district provide opportunities for personnel to collaborate and share expertise about meeting the needs of students with disabilities? Are special education and related service specialists available to support teachers?

- Do staff development activities address the needs of a diverse student population?

- Is staff development time used for a mixture of activities, such as new knowledge dissemination, dialogue (goals, mission, direction), and curriculum planning?

- Does the district include parents in its professional development activities? Are staff development activities open to the school's other stakeholders to work with and achieve better results for students with the full range of abilities and disabilities?

Funding

State-Level Questions

- Do the state special education funding policies allow districts to draw down the same amount of money for students who receive their services in the general education class-

room as those who receive their services in special education classrooms or separate special education schools?

- Does the state's funding system provide districts with adequate fiscal resources to meet the needs of all students?

- Does the state utilize its discretionary dollars to promote unified, inclusive programming and professional development that links general education to teachers of special population students?

- Does the state allow transfers of state funds between broad categories, such as from transportation to personnel? (Such cost shifting is often needed in inclusive districts as special transportation costs decrease and personnel needs increase.)

- Does the state sponsor cost studies with respect to new programmatic innovations, such as support teams, inclusion, and "push-in" ancillary staff/services, such as Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy?

District-Level Questions

- Do districts use special education and general education dollars in a way that complements rather thanduplicates materials and services?

- Are special education resources used to ensure that the general education environment meets the needs of all students?

- Have district studies been undertaken on the cost of maintaining separate systems for general and special education? If so, what were the findings?

Governance

State-Level Questions

- Do the state's administrative education structures promote the delivery of instruction for all students in the regular education environment?

- Is the state department of education organized into a unified system based on function, such as curriculum, assessment and finance, versus special programs such as special education, compensatory education, and gifted and talented education?

- Do state education agencies interact with other social service agencies and organizations to support school-linked, integrated services?

- Do state policies with respect to school choice and charter schools attend to the equity issues related to students with disabilities?

District-Level Questions

- How much responsibility do building leaders have for personnel and services for all students in the school?

- Are those represented on school committees, school site councils and other governance structures familiar with the needs of all students in the building?

- Are principals responsible for all teachers in the school? Do principals evaluate all teachers, including itinerant services, in the school?

- Do the district school board, superintendent and appropriate district administrators ensure that bargaining agreements are consistent with the spirit of IDEA? Are special education staff responsible to building principals rather than central administrators?

- If there are site-based managers and school-site councils, are they provided with training in inclusive programming and special education so that resources are deployed at the school level in such a way as to promote inclusion and consider the needs of all students?

Conclusion

This framework provides guidance to school administrators, teachers, parents and other stakeholders seeking to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in the overall education system. Based on the major policy areas that are being used to implement standards based reform in the general education system, the framework seeks to support inclusion within current reform efforts. The framework provides stakeholders with questions they may use in evaluating the extent to which the current general education policies in their state or district support the needs of students with disabilities, as well as the needs of other student populations.

A variety of stakeholders are working to support students with disabilities in general education classrooms to ensure their access to high, rigorous standards, normalized student expectations and a regular social environment. Working on a student-by-student basis, they face a plethora of special and general education policies. The premise of these policies is that students with disabilities will have different expectations, a different curriculum, and different teachers and will not be part of state and district assessment and accountability systems.

Although written policies alone cannot change the behavior and attitudes of some educators about inclusion, policies that presume that students with disabilities should be *included* in the overall system and reform, will make it easier to include individual students in the future.

For further information concerning the use of this framework, contact Doug Fisher at 619-594-7179, Gail McGregor at 406-243-2348, or Virginia Roach at 703-684-4000.

Table A: A Framework for Assessing State and Local Policies for *All*

State and District Policy Area	**Curriculum**	**Assessment**	**Accountability**
General Policy Goal	*Curriculum that Embodies High Expectations and Standards for Achieving Individual Potential*	*Measurable Results for Teaching and Learning*	*Responsibilities among All Stakeholders*
Inclusive Policy Objective/Criteria	A curriculum based on standards that are sufficiently broad to support the learning needs of all students; curriculum includes academic and skill areas.	A set of assessments aligned with state and local standards for student performance that allow for varied assessments and utilize a broad array of accommodations for testing and learning with minimal exclusions provided for students with disabilities.	A multi-faceted accountability system focused on student performance and the process of teaching and learning for all students, instead of compliance monitoring as the primary emphasis, with clear rewards and sanctions applied to schools and localities.

Students within the Context of General Education Reform

Personnel Training and Development	**Funding**	**Governance**
Necessary Training and Tools for All Personnel	*Maximum Use of Every Education Dollar*	*Central Leadership and Support with Local Control and Responsibility*
A comprehensive system of professional training that supports and encourages the involvement of all personnel in addressing the learning needs of students with the full range of abilities and disabilities.	A unified funding system which supports the varied learning needs and abilities of all students.	An administrative structure within the educational system that serves all students rather than maintaining separate systems for general and special education and other special student populations. In addition, local site councils would be provided adequate training to include the needs of students with disabilities in their planning.

CISP Publications and Resources

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